

What is the new flu?

Influenza A (H1N1) is a respiratory infection caused by a new type A (H1N1) flu virus. This disease (which was first called swine flu and "new flu") is caused by a new subtype of flu virus against which, precisely because it is new, we are not immunised and many people will be in danger of catching it.

Does the move to phase 6 pandemic alert represent a serious situation?

At the present moment, a message of calm should be conveyed to people. In Spain, all the preventive measures are activated and our National Health System is prepared to deal with the situation. **On 11 June 2009 the WHO decided to raise the alert to phase 6**. This alert phase corresponds to high and sustained transmission of the virus at community level world-wide. The pandemic level declared by the WHO refers to the spread of the virus, not to increased severity. In fact, the WHO has classified the new flu as a moderate pandemic in terms of the global situation of the virus; however, it has stressed that the development of the pandemic depends on the social and health characteristics of each individual country. For example, in Europe and, therefore, in Spain, the illness is a minor one and evolves without complications. **The move to phase 6 alert, therefore, means that the virus has become widespread and transmission is sustained; it is not reflect the clinical severity of the disease.**

What is a flu pandemic?

A pandemic is an epidemic that simultaneously affects many countries world-wide. There is a likelihood that the new A/H1N1 virus will cause a pandemic for the reasons mentioned in the previous question.

What are the symptoms of type A(H1N1) flu?

The symptoms of type A(H1N1) flu in people are similar to those of the common seasonal flu, including very high temperature, respiratory symptoms (coughing, sneezing, runny nose) and a general feeling of being unwell. At times, there may be loss of appetite and/or diarrhoea.

How is flu type A(H1N1) transmitted?

Flu type A(H1N1) is transmitted in the same way as seasonal flu, mainly from one person to another when people who are infected cough or sneeze. People may also catch it by touching something that has the flu virus and then touching their mouth or nose. The virus is not transmitted by consuming pork or pork by-products.

Does the normal flu vaccine work?

The seasonal flu vaccine protects people against the usual strains of the flu viruses. It is not yet known whether the seasonal flu vaccine provides any protection against the new A(H1N1) flu viruses. This matter is currently being studied.

Is there any treatment?

A(H1N1) flu is treated with the same measures and medicines as the common flu. Antivirals such as oseltamivir and zanamivir are being used in cases being treated, though only with a medical prescription.

How can virus contagion and spreading be prevented?

The following are the preventive measures against A(H1N1) flu:

Personal measures:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a paper handkerchief when you cough or sneeze and dispose of it in the waste bin.
- If you do not have a paper handkerchief, cough and sneeze onto the sleeve of your shirt so as not to contaminate your hands.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap (for 15-20 seconds), especially after coughing or sneezing.
- Do not share personal hygiene or washing objects (glasses, towels, etc.).

Measures in our living environment:

- Air the home every day, including bedrooms and common areas.
- Clean frequently with the usual cleaning products surfaces and objects which are used by more than one person (clothes, crockery, worktops, bathtub, door knobs, toys, telephones, etc.).

Is the use of masks to be recommended?

It has not been demonstrated that the generalised use of masks by the population reduces the spread of the virus, and particularly not outdoors. Masks may be of some use to people who are in contact with the sick or to contain the micro-drops expelled by the latter when coughing or sneezing. However, if they are not used properly the risk of transmission may increase. The measures recommended to avoid contagion are more effective.

When should a mask be worn?

Masks are not recommended for the general population. They are only recommended for sick persons while they are in contact with other people and the people caring for them.

What should I do if I have symptoms?

People displaying the usual flu symptoms (high temperature, coughing and muscular pains) and a temperature above 38° C should make an appointment between 8 am and 9 pm at their usual Health Centre, where they will receive the appropriate information on the care they need. Between 9 pm and 8 am of the following day and on bank holidays, call 112

Is it okay to travel abroad?

Yes. Neither Spain nor the international institutions (World Health Organisation, CDC, European Union) recommend restricting travel on account of this new AH1N1 flu. The A/H1N1 flu has now been confirmed in many countries world-wide, so restricting travel would have a very slight effect or no effect at all on the spread of the disease. People who travel can protect themselves and others by observing some simple hygiene recommendations; these are sensible measures that may restrict the spread of many transmissible diseases, not just the A/H1N1 flu, such as: washing one's hands regularly with soap and water, covering one's mouth when coughing or sneezing, contacting the health services if one observes flu symptoms and watching for possible symptoms up

to 7 days after returning from travelling. As a general recommendation, infected persons should postpone any travel they have planned, and travellers returning to their place of origin who become ill should seek the necessary medical attention.

What must be done when a case is detected?

Besides administering the right treatment for each patient, surveillance is intensified; the health services are informed of cases' characteristics so that similar cases may be detected. Epidemiological studies are conducted to detect new cases, including looking for contacts of persons who have caught the flu.

Where can I get reliable information about the flu?

Ministry of Health and Social Policy: <http://www.msps.es/>

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation MAEC: www.maec.es

World Health Organisation: www.who.int/es

Information on new flu cases in WHO countries (English):

<http://www.who.int/csr/disease/swineflu/en/index.html>

European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) (English):

http://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/health_content/Articles/article_20090425.aspx

US Disease Control Centre:

<http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/espanol/influenza-porcina-info-general.htm>